

Hindu Gods and Goddesses Rooted in Japan

Lokesh Chandra

प्रस्तुतावस्थां प्रथमभागे सरस्वत्याः, लक्ष्म्याश्च उपासना-
परम्परां प्रस्तुत्य द्वितीये भागे इतरेषां देवानां वर्णनं विधीयते।
चिवेन् सोभ्यो महोदया स्वीये शरीरे सरस्वत्याः समावेशम-
नुभूय अनधीतया संकृतगिरा लेखितुं समारभत, तथा
सरस्वतीवर्गस्य स्थापनां चाकरोदिति वर्णनं कस्य भारतीयस्य
मनो न हरेत्। एवमितरेषां सोमादिदेवानां सचित्रे विवरणं
प्रस्तुत्य जापान्देशे हिन्दुदेवानामुपासनाक्रमः प्रस्तूयतेऽत्र लेखे।

In the cool autumn of 1936, two Japanese students came to study Sanskrit with my father Prof. Raghu Vira at Lahore. Both of them belonged to the Shingon sect of Buddhism, which has a rich repertoire of ritual with a multiplication of gods and goddesses from the vajrakula, Śākyamuni Buddha evolving into Transcendental Buddhas, a host of Bodhisattvas, besides a resplendent theogony of Mahāyāna and Mantranaya of Tantras. Shingon lights homa (Jap. goma) with Sanskrit mantras and mudrās, and has the imprint of other earlier elements of Hindu dynamics. Shingon is the confident carrying on of the roots, the cosmodrama of continuing forms and ideas, the landscape of thought, the historic values of light, the creation of the power ‘dwelling within’ in new forms. My father loved Japan in her ardent destiny of creative toil. He loved that in life which filled him with wonder. He requested his disciple Yamamoto Chikyo to teach me Japanese. The first lesson a i u e o, ka ki ku ke ko brought to me the synonymies of sharing and I told my father: “we and the Japanese are brothers”. The Japanese syllabary is so similar in sequence to the Sanskrit alphabet. These forms draw out of their distant past a magical creativity that lives on, these lovely dreams in the poetry of sharing. These pure vocalic syllables blazed fresh trails in the glory of writing.

Fudō or Acala-nātha is the presiding deity of Japanese homa. Yamamoto had a scroll of Fudō, vigorous in the aureole of blazing

flames, shattering the debris of the human heart. As a child of nine, I wondered at a god in the devastation of fire. It was an iconic endeavour of a rational fire to root out whatever is unwholesome in life. My father linked the scroll to stanza 11.17 of the Bhagavad Gītā:

paśyāmi tvāṁ durnirīkṣyaṁ samantād

dipt-ānalārka-dyutim aprameyam.

The lord in the surround of immeasurable flames of fire. The deep roots of India are enshrined in Agni a word that that begins the R̥gveda: Agnim īde 'I pay homage to the fire', the fire of illumination, an ever fresh fire beginning to affect an entire life. So is Fudō/Acala the rich of creativity.

Yamamoto had a venerable ancient xylograph (Jap. mokuban) of the illustrations of mudrās used in the Garbhadhātu and Vajradhātu-mandalas, in general homa, and in the eighteen-step rite. Its Japanese title was Tai-kon-go-jūhachi-in-zu. It was printed from woodblocks in 1779. It begins Shingon rites with two mudrās of Vināyaka or Gaṇapati. It is reproduced below from the Taishō edition of the Tripiṭaka:



遺
除
毘
那
夜
迦
印

胎
藏
界
印
圖

十
胎
金
護
八
印
圖

附
四
度
法
要
集



They recreate the threshold of identification, the sources of inspiration that have influenced our minds and lives, the inner synthesis that talks to ourselves at both edges of unhappiness and of joy.

Buddhism gained a strong foothold in Japan during the reign of Empress Suikō (r.593-628). Prince Shōtoku was appointed Regent in 593. He renovated the system of twelve court ranks and drew up the Constitution of 17 Articles in 604 whereby he centralised power under the direct control of the Emperor in political precepts of justice to the people. This Constitution guaranteed far-reaching changes: article 1 harmonious personal relations, article 2 Buddhism or Triratna as the guiding principle of the state, article 5 complaints of the people must be given a fair hearing and justice, article 16 good care of the peasantry, article 17 opinions of many persons concerning important decisions, and article 12 local chieftains could not levy taxes on people without compassion.

On assuming Regency, Prince Shōtoku set up the Shitennōji or the Monastery of the Four Devarājas at Osaka. It was based on the sixth Chapter of the Suvāṇabhāsa-sūtra. The Suv. is an important Buddhist sūtra to ensure sovereignty, the dynamics of governance inherent in the nexus of the king, his people, and their deities symbolising values, to effect the security of economy, and to preempt natural calamities, diseases, and wars. Lord Buddha was of royal descent, and his dharma grew under the eyes of Kings Bimbisāra and Prasenajit. Naturally the sūtras became the embodied mind of the regnum and a millenium later it provided ceremonies for the protection of the state in Japan. In 606 Empress Kuikō requested Prince Shōtoku to lecture on three Sūtras: Suv., Lotus Sūtra, and Shōmangyō (Śrīmālādevī-siṃhanāda-sūtra). The central role of the Suv. in the state ceremonies was responsible for the wide-spread prevalence of the Hindu goddesses Sarasvatī and Śrī (or Lakṣmī), both in imperial and private ceremonies. Chapter 7 of the Suv. is devoted to Sarasati and the next chapter 8 to Śrī mahādevatā. They are the only two of the five goddesses to whom special prominence was given by the chapters.

The introductory chapter of the Suv. lays out theme (nidāna) of the sūtra. The Tathāgata dwells on Mount Gṛdhra-kūṭa surrounded by five Great Goddesses (mahādevatā). Each of them has a protective function as : the tutelary goddess of the royal family of Śakyamuni (his *kula-devatā*), the protective goddess of the territorial

State (*Prthivi-devatā*), Sarasvatī as the Goddess of Learning, Śrī (Lakṣmī) as the Goddess of a Flourishing Economy, and Hārītī as the Goddess of Defence.

The Suv. was one of the three “sūtras protecting the country” (gōkuko-kyō) and Emperor Shōmu (ruled 724-749) ordered the recitation of the Sūtra in all the provinces in 741 to protect against calamities, pestilence and sorrow. His Majesty ordered that each province should build a 17storeyed stūpa and write out ten copies of the Sūtra. He had copies written in golden characters and deposited one in each stūpa.

The annals of Tōdaiji monastery mention that the celebration of the worship of Śrī (Lakṣmī) and Sarasvatī was held for the first time in this monastery in 722. Ever since, it has been an annual celebration. Sarasvatī is represented in two forms. In the serene (śānta) form she holds a viṇā. In the violent (krodha) she has eight arms that hold weapons: bow, arrow, sword, trident, axe, vajra, cakra and noose. The Sarasvatī of Tōdaiji had eight arms. A catastrophic fire broke out in 1954 and she was reduced to a whitish clay color, revealing that the sculpture was of unbaked clay. This image is 6.5 feet high. The worship of Sarasvatī and Lakṣmī has remained popular for bumper crops. The Besson-zakki or description of deities, written by Shinkaku in the 12th century gives her mantra: sarasvatyai svāhā/namo sarasvatyai mahādevyai svāhā/namo bhagavati mahādevi Sarasvati/siddhyantu mantra-padāni svāhā/

A painting of the Eight-armed Sarasvatī, dating to 1212, is preserved at the University of Fine Arts, Tokyo. It is one of the finest scrolls of the goddess.

The oldest shrine of Sarasvatī started in 834 by monk Ennin is that of Chikubushima. Famous poets like Miyako no Yoshika (824-879) visited this shrine for inspiration, and Sarasvatī is supposed to have told him a line of his poem in a dream.

In the 12th century, the Minamoto and Taira clans were fighting for supremacy. Tsunemasa of the Taira clan, a fine poet and musician, and the governor of Tajima, made a pilgrimage to Chikubushima shrine. He prayed to Sarasvatī the whole night to defeat his enemies.

Prime Minister Fujiwara no Moronaga (1177) was an adept in playing the lute and had the title Myōo-nin (Myōo is an epithet of Saravati).

The Noh drama Chikubushima opens with a courtier going on pilgrimage to Chikubushima to worship Sarasvatī. This reflects the wide popularity of the worship of the goddess.

In the 16th century arose the cult of the Shichifukujin 'Seven Deities of Fortune.' In them, Sarasvatī is the goddess of wealth. In her Japanese name Benzaiten, **zai** means 'talent', but it was replaced by another ideogram read **zai** and meaning 'wealth'. She became the most popular goddess in Kyoto and a number of shrines were dedicated to her.

Several hagiographies, hymns and sūtras were written for the worship of Sarasvatī and the benefits that accrue therefrom. When Ennin was suffering from an eye disease in 834, Sarasvatī appeared to him in a dream, gave a medicine and her wooden image. On waking he found the image and medicine that cured him. These unconscious psychological values mingle mind and body. They are a will to heal.

In 1836 Saitō Sachio wrote a guidebook to the Edo area, or modern Tokyo. Sarasvatī was the most popular goddess. He describes her sanctuary on an island in the Mitaka city near Tokyo. In 1333, Nitta Yoshishada had prayed to her to destroy the Hōjō house.

In 1832 Saitō Gesshin wrote the Tōto Saijiki to describe the annual festivals of Edo. He lists 131 Sarasvatī shrines in the Tokyo area.

In 1934 lady Chiben Sonnyo realised that Sarasvatī had descended in her body, and she started writing Sanskrit that she had never studied. She founded the Benten-shū "Sarasvatī sect" and this sect holds water as divine, being the abode of the goddess. Sarasvatī (i) literally means 'abounding in pools, lakes, or waters', (ii) it is the name of a river in Gandhara, (iii) the mighty river that once flowed over the vast expanses of Brahmāvarta, (iv) invoked to bestow vitality, renown and riches, (v) as the destroyer of Vṛtra the demon, (vi) as the Goddess of Eloquence and Learning. Her connection to water is as ancient the Vedic period: Sarasvatī is any river in the Nighaṇṭu. The several functions associated with Sarasvatī in Japan go back to Hindu sources which lived on in the popular imagery of the people and the literati.

In 1970 I stayed at Koyasam with Dr. Yamamoto Chikyo my teacher of Japanese language, literature, art and history. In his kitchen

was an elegant sketch of eight-armed Sarasvatī in the forceful lines of an unknown monk. It was a simple, direct attraction of a world that becomes aware of itself, the impassioned domination of a symbolism inherent in the name of Śuddhodana the father of Śākyamuni Buddha. Śuddhodana means 'having pure food'. Outstripping the confines of language, it was a thrill with living roots transformed into the symbolism of meaning. Why was Sa-rasvatī in a kitchen? The word **rasavatī** means 'kitchen', and **sa** is a prefix to express conjunction: the Goddess connected with the kitchen.

Sarasvatī is still very popular as one of the Seven Deities of Felicity or Shichi-fuku-jin in Japanese. She is the only goddess among the Seven Lucky Gods and can be recognised by the musical instrument biwa or vīṇā she carries. She had the largest following among professional musicians during the Heian period. Court musicians who played the biwa remained single in former days for if they married, Sarasvatī would become jealous and they would lose their musical ability. Married couples pray to her to have beautiful daughters. She also grants children to childless couples. She is the patron goddess of writers, musicians, geisha, painters, sculptors, and performing artists. The Sarasvatī on the island of Chikubu-shima is the most widely worshipped to this day. The Hadaka Benten or Naked Sarasvatī on the Enoshima island is the most famous. She does not wear clothes, as the humid sea air around the island would cause the dyes of the cloth to come off and stain her. She is painted white and her purity would be sullied by their stains. In India, Durgā is called Digambarī, and Śiva is Digambara or Digvāsas, both names mean 'Sky-clad', that is, with no vestments.

The transmission of Hindu deities to Japan was through two Sūtras: (i) Suvarṇabhāṣottama-sūtra and (ii) Mahāvairocana-sūtra. The first Sūtra was translated by Dharmarakṣa between 414-421, Paokuei compiled the synthesised version in 597 (K 128), and Itsing did the last version in 703 at the Hsi-ming Monastery (K 127). Itsing's translation was commissioned by Empress Wu and it was appropriately titled Konkomyō-**saishō-kyō**: **kon** 'suvarṇa, gold', **kwo myō** 'bhāṣottama, light', **saishō** 'vijayanta=Indra', **ō** 'rāja, king', **kyō** 'sūtra'. It is full translation of the Sanskrit title Suvarṇa-bhāṣottama-sūtra-endra-rāja. Indra the King of Gods is also called Vijayanta which is rendered into Chinese as saishō. The title of the Sūtra was auspicious for Empress Wu and it became the authoritative text in Japan to bless the state, the ruler and the ruled, with all the things they need. The Suv. transmitted to Japan the Hindu goddess Sarasvatī

and Śrī (Lakṣmī) as two of the five Great Goddesses (mahādevatā) who blessed Bodhisattva Siddhārtha on his way to Enlightenment as Bhagavān Śākyamuni. The eighth chapter of the Suv. is devoted to Śrī Mahadevī. She says that when one mutters the name of the excellent Suv. the goddess will direct her attention to him and create a great fortune (**mahatīm śrīyam karisyati**, Suv. 1.15). By the power of this Sūtra she will watch over his residence, increase the provision of food-grains, will endow him with gold, jewels, wealth, and provide with all blessings. The Chinese translation says that the ceremony of Śrī “gives immeasurable joy, all roots of wisdom, and all ornaments of beneficent virtue” (Visser 1.309).

In 739 Emperor Shōmu issued an ordinance that the ceremony of Śrī (Jap. Kichijō-ten) be performed all over the Empire so that wind and rain are harmonious and the crops ripen. Śrī promises abundant harvests and no famine ever to faithful readers of the Suv. In 749 the Emperor again ordered the rites and forbade the killing of living beings anywhere. Empress Kōken followed the wishes of her father Emperor Shōmu and continued the celebrations in the temples of all the provinces. The high priests of all the great Buddhist monasteries expounded the Suv. and performed the Śrī rites all over the country, resulting in severe and constant famine in the ensuing year. He re-established a regular Śrī ceremony. It was performed in government offices by Buddhist monks of all the monasteries up to the reign of Emperor Go Reizei (1037-1068). Śrī rites ensured the Great Peace of the Realm, wind and rain in good season, ripening of the five cereals, joy of the people, and felicity of all sentient beings of the ten quarters. Śrī was the mightiest protectress of faithful believers in the holy King of Sūtras, the Suv., ‘the Sūtra of the Golden Light.’

The official history Shoku Nihongi records an edict of 749 to hold the Śrī congregation in all the monasteries of the country for 49 days beginning with the New Year Day. Another entry of 767 has an imperial edict ordering all the provincial monasteries (kokubunji) to hold the Lakṣmī ceremonies for seven days so that she blesses the country with peace, proper rains, a bumper harvest, benevolence and happiness to the people. In 768 the office of the Prime Minister decided that the worship of Śrī would be carried out in every monastery of the country. Scrolls of Śrī were distributed to the provincial temples for worship. The scroll of Śrī in the Yakushiji monastery at Nara, and the image in the Hokkedō shrine of the Tōdaiji monastery at Nara have survived from this period. The Im-

perial Ambassador to the Tang court Sugawara no Kiyotomo faced a ferocious typhoon on the way in 804. He prayed to Śrī. As She appeared in the sky, the storm subsided. On return, he dedicated a temple to Her. She became very popular in the nobility. When the monks and nuns became negligent, the Śrī ceremonies began to be held in government offices since 822 and not in the provincial monasteries. The Kisshōion shrine of Śrī in Kyoto, built in 890, was active as late as 1712. The famous Japanese novel *Genji Monogatari* alludes to the popularity of Śrī among the aristocrats. It was written around 1000. A collection of stories titled *Konjaku Monogatari* of the 12th century relates stories of getting wealth through the blessings of Śrī. The work of Saitō Sachiō on Edo mentions the shrine of Śrī in the Edo area in 1836. Among them was the Hōkōdō shrine in the Ueno area of Tokyo. In the *sādhana* of Śrī the officiant visualises the *bījaksara śrī* inside a moon disc. It changes into the *cintāmaṇi* jewel, which transforms into Goddess Śrī, who is full-bodied and beautiful. As the officiant gazes at the statue of Śrī on the altar, he consubstantiates into the deity.

Goddess Śrī was the florescence of power and closely associated with ceremonies of the state and aristocrats. *Sarasvatī* was a dedication to the glory of arts, and was the very language of life, in the rich deposits of the dreams of artists and literati. As the role of Śrī declined in imperial ceremonies, she was replaced by *Saravatī* who still remains a popular goddess.

II

Other Hindu deities came to Japan alongwith *mantrayāna* or *Shingon* sect with its liturgies in Sanskrit, rich iconography expressed as icons or *Siddham* syllables (*bījākṣara* or *shūji*), and the four arts of (i) painting and sculpture, (ii) music and literature, (iii) gestures and acts, and (iv) the implements of civilization and religion, as enumerated by Kōbō Daishi. Kōbō Daishi transmitted *Shingon* culture to Japan "to enlighten the darkness of the people and help save them materially". One of the two main sacred texts of *Shingon* is the *Mahāvairocana-sūtra*. It was translated into Chinese by Śubhākarasimṛha (637-735) with the assistance of I-hsing (683-727). Kōbō Daishi introduced this and other sacred texts to Japan in 806. The *Mahāvairocana-sūtra* has been represented graphically as the *Garbhadhātu-mandala*. It has three main concentric rectangles. The outer rectangle has deities of the *vajra* family. *Vajra* connotes the Hindu pantheon. The deities are :

The Trinity

Brahmā

Umā and Maheśvara, Gaṇapati, Kumāra

Nārāyaṇa and Nārāyaṇī

Seven Mātṛkās

Raudrī, Vaiṣṇavī, Yamī, Brāhmī, Aindrī, Cāmuṇḍā] Kaumārī

Twelve Devas (Jap. Jūniten) or Spatial Deities

Indra (E), Agni (SE), Yama(S), Nirṛti (SW), Varuṇa (W)

Vāyu (NW), Kubera (N), Īśāna (NE), Brahmā (zenith), Pṛthivī (nadir)

Sūrya, Candra

Temporal Deities of the Moon Family (Candra-kula)

(i) Twelve Signs of the Zodiac (Rāśi, Jap.kū)

Simha, Kanyā, Tulā, Vṛścika, Dhanu, Makara

Kumbha, Mīna, Meṣa, Vṛṣa, Mithuna, Karkaṭaka

(ii) Twenty-eight Constellations (Nakṣatra, Jap.shū)

7 constellations in the East: Kṛittikā, Rohiṇī, Mṛgaśīras, Ārdrā, Punarvasu, Puṣya, Āśleṣa

7 constellations in the South: Maghā, Pūrva-phalgunī, Uttara-phalgunī, Hasta, Citrā, Svātī, Viśākhā

7 constellations in the West: Anurādhā, Jyēṣṭhā, Mūla, Purvāṣāḍhā, Uttarāṣāḍhā, Abhijit, Śravaṇa

7 constellations in the North: Dhaniṣṭhā, Śatabhiṣaj, Revatī, Aśvinī, Bharanī, Pūrva-bhadrapadā, Uttara-bhadrapadā,

Temporal Deities of the Sun Family (Sūrya-kula)

(iii) Nine Planets (nava-graha, Jap. shichiyō)

Āditya, Soma, Aṅgāraka, Budha, Bṛhaspati, Śukra, Śanaiścara, Rāhu, Ketu

The Sun and Moon recur among the Twelve Devas and the Nine Planets.

They have different names in Sanskrit in the two families:

Sun Sūrya (as one of the Twelve Devas), Āditya (as one of the Nine Planets)

Moon Candra (as one of the Twelve Devas), Soma (as one of the Nine Planets)

Out of the above-named 75 deities only Gaṇapati was worshipped in his own right, though offerings were made to other deities in the homa of the Garbhadhātu-mandala. The manuals of homa rites give their mantras and mudrās to be employed in the liturgy. They are the sublime threads in the interweave of forms and psyche seeking the symbol of trans-human mode of Being, overstepping every boundary. They are manifestations of Buddhist deities, e.g. Maheśvara is a manifestation of Mahāvairocana. Their iconic description, etymology, and philosophical interpretations are detailed in exegetical works.

The Twelve Devas were the Guardians of the four directions, four intermediate regions (SE, SW, etc.), zenith, nadir, and the Sun and Moon. The history Shoku Nihonkōi says that an edict was issued in 846 that Indra and Brahmā will be worshipped at the Enryakuji Monastery with the offering of white rice. The stories of Indra are recounted in the Konjaku Monogatari. The Shintōshū collection of folk-tales of the 14th century cites Indra and Śacī as an ideal couple. The Japanese saint Nichiren who founded the Lotus Sect had great faith in Indra. A temple is dedicated to Indra in the Shibamata area of Tokyo. It is the most important shrine nowadays. It was constructed in 1629. Another temple of Indra is in the Katsushika ward of Tokyo. Indra is installed in the Tsūmyōji monastery in Kyoto. People pray to him for prosperous business.

Agni is accompanied by five great sages (ṛṣi): Vasiṣṭha, Arṣi, Gautama, Bhṛgu and Angiras.

Yama is popular as a judge of human actions after death. He gives rewards or punishments according to the karmas of men. He has been and still is popular among the masses. Famous Japanese epics like the Heike Monogatari recount his stories. In the year 1172 Yama's messenger delivered a letter to a monk to report to Yama's office. The monk gives a vivid description of the palace of Yama. During the Edo period there were a number of Yama shrines in Edo. The Tōto Saijiki of 1832 describes the ceremonies in thirty-one shrines of Yama in the Edo area.

Varuṇa was worshipped to prevent droughts, typhoons, floods etc. which occur in Japan frequently. Japanese annals make special reference to the prevention of these calamities. A shrine was dedicated to Varuṇa in the Fudōdō sanctuary in the Meguro ward in Tokyo in 1836.

Jūniten-gi says that those who want to join public service should worship Brahmā. He is mentioned frequently in literary works as flanking Śākyamuni, along with Indra.

Ṁṛthivī was worshipped for happiness, or when diseases spread, due to the defiling of the earth.

The temporal deities belonged either to the lunar family (**candra-kula**) or to the solar family (**sūrya-kula**). The lunar family has Twelve Signs of the Zodiac (Rāśi) and the Twenty-eight Constellations (nakṣatra). They were important in the homa rites of the Garbhadhātumaṇḍala, but they did not become popular in their own right.

The Nine Planets (nava-graha) play an important role due to their astrological resonations. Amoghavajra (705-774) says in his Chinese translation of the Mahāmāyūrī: “There are nine planets which increase and decrease in the course of twenty-eight constellations during the day and night. They bring to the world prosperity or calamity, pain or pleasure according to their correspondences... These nine planets are powerful forces, augurers of good or bad luck” (Taishō 19.437a14).

During my first visit to Koyasan in 1970, I witnessed that navagraha worship was a living imperative. The gods are alive, they keep a watch over our erratic destinies, though they wander in the wind. Along a road stood an egglike rock on a flat roundish base of another rock, with the Sanskrit monogram RO : Sanskrit letters implying deeper levels. A modern Japanese girl in mini, her hair dyed blonde and perhaps with styrene injection for a rounded feminine form, stops by, graciously puts a tangerine on a piece of paper as an offering to the nine planets. RO is the bījākṣara for nava-graha-pūjā.



Offering of a tangerine to RO, the syllble for the *nava-graha*

The Kanchi-in sanctuary in the Tōji monastery has a scroll of the ritual of the Nine Planets, along with their illustrations and Sanskrit mantras in Siddham script. The illustrations and mantras are cited hereunder.



Budha

[illegible]

計都眞言
字可平氣



ॐ व ह्रीं क्लीं उ म न ह्रीं र ह्रीं य
 ॐ नमो भगवते वासुदेवाय

Sumé

[illegible]

The Garuḍa is worshipped to cure diseases caused by poison: so we learn from the Asabashō by Shōchō (1205-1281). Mahākāla, translated into Japanese as Daikoku 'Great Black' has undergone interesting transformation as the God of Fortune. Mahā means 'great' and kāla is 'time'. He carries a golden mallet of wealth, holds a sack full of precious objects, symbols of prosperity and wealth. The farmers regard him as the god of five cereals, and pay homage after harvest. He is the patron of farmers and businessmen.

Gaṇapati is known in Japanese as Shōten 'Noble God', or Kangiten 'Nandikeśvara', or transliterated as Ganabashi. Gaṇapati, was introduced to Japan in 806 as a deity in the outer circle of the Gabhadhātu-maṇḍala.

The Tōkakuzan Kichijōin Temple in the Setagaya Ward was founded in 740 by monk Gyōgi. It has a pure gold image of Gaṇapati, which was worshipped by the regent Hōjō Yasutoki (1183-1242). The image in the Tsurugaoka Hachiman Shrine is said to have been brought from China by Ennin (794-864).

The Shōtengū temple in the Asakusa area of Tokyo was built in the early ninth century. The locality is called Shōten-chō 'Gaṇapati Township'. In 1832 there were around a hundred shrines of Gaṇapati in this area. I visited this temple in 1970 with Prof. Yamamoto Chikyo. It was crowded with young boys and girls, besides middle-aged persons. Prof. Yamamoto informed me that the young generation prays to Gaṇapati for success in their courtship, and the middle-aged businessmen seek blessings for a flourishing business and prosperity. The Japanese worship him for happiness and to resolve discords. He is Kangi-ten 'God of Joy', Nandikeśvara, and of love. Miracles follow sincere worship.

Emperor Uda Tennō (ruled 888-897) held a ceremony for his grandfather in 851 at the Kajōji temple whose main deity was Gaṇeśa or Daishō Kangiten.

The travel account of Philipp Franz von Siebold suggests that Gaṇapati was popular during the Edo period. The metallic statue in the Kangiin temple of Saitama Prefecture was installed in 1198. It has been designed a national treasure. In the 13th century the statue of Gaṇapati was consecrated in the Shōtenin Temple in the same preference. It is an esoteric image and is not shown to the people.

Gaṇapati was worshipped at the Toji Monastery, as mentioned in the Keiran Shūyōshū.

When emperor Go Yōzei fell ill in 1598, homa offerings were made to Gaṇapati for his recovery in the most elaborate and powerful ceremonies.

The biography of monk Tankai Risshi says that he consecrated an image of Gaṇapati in 1678 in the Hōsanji Temple near Nara, which was specially built for him. The monk used to have discussions with Gaṇapati. It is a famous image known as Ikoma no Shōtensan.

Temples to Gaṇapati were consecrated in several important cities of Japan. Monk Ikū installed a Gaṇapati in the Shōbiji Temple near Osaka in 1682, after worshipping it for 121 days. It is one of the most sacred of images of Gaṇapati in Japan, and is called Yamazaki no Shōten.

Throughout the centuries special temples were consecrated to Gaṇapati. Early in the 19th century, the Asakusa area in Tokyo had the largest concentration of Gaṇapati temples as referred to in the Edo Meisho Zue.

As the Jingoji monastery of Takao a special temple is consecrated to the esoteric Twin Gaṇapati and every year a worship is held in his honour. In other Mantrayānic monasteries too special shrines are dedicated to Gaṇapati. Homes in Koyasan are hallowed by Gaṇapati. On the last day of my stay at Koyasan, I sat on a bench for the bus to the railway station. Curiosity took me inside the shop and there was a graceful image of a standing Gaṇapati in white wood. My repeated entreaties to the shop-owner to give it to me only evoked smiles and polite bowings. Alas for my vain desire! The overflowing bounty of the grace of Gaṇapati still glimmers in the adoring hearts of Japan. Kangi-ten or Nandikeśvara Gaṇapati.

Calms us, gives us a tranquil mind

Every vulgar shadow is dissipated

And caprice is subdued.

Joy, yes, and Harmony.